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The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

Department of History

National Socialism and the Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen,"
1932-1933: Analysis of a Political Relationship

A Thesis in

History

by

Eugene W. Miller, Jr.

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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PREFACE

This thesis represents an attempt to discuss and analyze the political relationship between the National Socialist Party and the evangelical church movement known as the Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen" from the latter's inception in 1932 to the end of 1933. It is hoped that one may find the story of this relationship to be a microcosm of NSDAP religious policy in particular and the Party's method of political operation in general. One should not expect to find herein a history of the Deutschen Christen, much less a history of the evangelical Kirchenkampf as a whole. Even to have harbored such ambitions would have been foolhardy.

The text makes rather liberal use of both German terms and abbreviations. I have chosen to use German words--for example, Glaubensbewegung or Deutschen Christen--where I consider the usual translation--in this case, "Faith Movement" or "German Christians"--either inadequate or confusing. There are also a number of German terms--such as Gleichschaltung and Distanzierung--for which there exist no satisfactory English equivalents. Abbreviations have been used primarily as a stylistic device; the most common are NSDAP and GDC.

It would be impossible for me to acknowledge adequately the numerous individuals and institutions who have been of help in the preparation of this thesis. During my stay in Germany, many people were extremely helpful in guiding me to source materials. In particular, I wish to thank Professor Dr. Kurt Meier of Leipzig who kindly provided me with material and advice relevant to my topic;

Dr. Helmut Baier of Nuremberg for a great many helpful suggestions in pursuit of information on the Deutschen Christen; Professor Dr. Hans Buchheim of the Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, for permission to photocopy the MS. of Friedrich Wieneke's Kirche und Partei; Herr Ulrich Kabitz of Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich, for permission to use relevant galley proofs from Armin Boyens' Die Ökumenische Bewegung und die Bekennende Kirche in Deutschland 1933-1939; and Herr Heinz Hannmann of "Der Bücherwurm," Berlin, for procuring numerous books for me.

Among those who were of specific assistance in my archival work were Dr. Volker Wagner, his assistant Dr. Werner, and the staff of the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz; Dr. Carsten Nicolaisen of Die Kommission für die Geschichte des Kirchenkampfes, Munich; Dr. Hans Steinberg and the staff of the Landeskirchenarchiv der Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen, Bielefeld; and Dr. Anton Hoch and the staff of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich. I am also very grateful for similar help to the staffs of the Berlin Document Center; the Central Bibliothek der Inneren Mission, Berlin; the library of the Kirchenkanzlei der Evangelischen Kirche der Union, Berlin; the Landesarchiv Berlin; the Staatsarchiv Berlin-Dahlem; the library of the Kirchliche Hochschule, Berlin; the Forschungsstelle für die Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus in Hamburg; the Landeskirchlichen Archiv Karlsruhe; and the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Despite the fact that I was a stranger in their midst, a number of people took time out of busy schedules to grant personal interviews and do other personal favors. Such friendship was extended me by Dr. Hans-Joachim Thilo, pastor of the Marienkirche in Lübeck,

and his wife; Bishop Friedrich Hübner of Schleswig-Holstein, who interrupted his work to grant me a wholly unexpected interview; Dr. Walter Zimmermann, president of the Lutherischer Kirchenamt, Berlin, who, in addition to the kindness of giving an interview, proffered some valuable and completely unanticipated financial assistance; and Professor Heinrich Vogel of the Kirchliche Hochschule, Berlin, who gave me many vivid impressions of the Kirchenkampf era. I should also like to thank especially Dr. Eberhard Bethge, whose acquaintance I first made in State College and whose help in Germany was invaluable.

I owe a debt of gratitude as well to many people in this country. Professor Gerhard Weinberg of the University of Michigan first aroused my interest in the era of the Kirchenkampf. Dr. Franklin H. Littell of Temple University provided me with valuable advice on questions relating to my subject, as did Dr. Theodore Tappert of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. Mr. Robert Wolfe of the National Archives gave essential help and much needed advice regarding extant documentary material both here and abroad. Mrs. Mary Ferry and the staff of the library of the Hazleton Campus, The Pennsylvania State University, hunted down and procured for me a long list of books through interlibrary loan.

Dr. Richard Solberg, academic dean at Thiel College, Greenville, Pennsylvania, provided me with extremely valuable advice and published material in my area of interest, in addition to making several important German contacts for me.

Mrs. Elizabeth Bodenstein, assistant professor of German at the Hazleton Campus, displayed the patience of Job in her painstaking transliteration of Wieneke's lengthy Kirche und Partei from

the German script. Through the kind offices of the staff of the Hazleton Area Public Library, who made their microcopying facilities available to me, I was able to provide Mrs. Bodenstein with what must have seemed an endless supply of pages from the Wieneke MS. She has been of great help to me in this effort and in a variety of other ways.

I cannot begin to thank Dr. Kent Forster, Chairman of the Department of History at The Pennsylvania State University, for his guidance. Dr. Forster, my advisor throughout this endeavor, has rendered invaluable assistance during all stages of the dissertation process.

The encouragement and assistance of my parents, Eugene and Agnes Miller, is not done justice by a mere expression of gratitude.

Likewise, words are inadequate to express my debt to my wife, Mary Ann, without whose patience, companionship, advice, encouragement and untold hours of material help this thesis would not have been possible.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADG	<u>Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Deutschen Glaubensbewegung</u> (Study Group of the German Faith Movement)
CDB	<u>Christlich-deutsche Bewegung</u> (Christian-German Movement)
DEK	<u>Deutschen Evangelischen Kirche</u> (German Evangelical Church)
GDC	<u>Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen"</u> (Faith Movement of the German Christians)
KDC	<u>Kirchenbewegung Deutsche Christen</u> (Church Movement of the German Christians)
NSBO	<u>Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganization</u> (National Socialist Factory Cell Organization)
NSDAP	<u>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</u> (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
SA	<u>Sturmabteilung</u> (storm troopers)
SPD	<u>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</u> (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
SS	<u>Schutzstaffel</u> (elite security force)

INTRODUCTION

Since the time of Martin Luther's alliance with the German princes, German Protestantism has maintained consistently strong ties with the German body politic. As political conditions altered, the evangelical churches, notably those of the Lutheran tradition, found it to their advantage to conform to them. The aftermath of the First World War revealed no exception to this general pattern. In 1919 the evangelical churches, like other elements of German life, were torn between competing loyalties: on the one hand that which revered the traditions of the Empire, and on the other that which sought to adapt to post-imperial conditions.¹

Before the war, Protestantism had been a bastion of custom and stability. From a doctrinal standpoint, the majority of German Protestants were Lutherans, but a significant minority were adherents of the Reformed or Calvinist creed. A third major element, the United, was an amalgam of Lutheran and Reformed beliefs.² These three groups

¹ Helpful works on the historical background include Karl Kupisch, Zwischen Idealismus und Massendemokratie: Eine Geschichte der evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland von 1815-1945 (Berlin: Lettner, 1959); and Kenneth Scott Latourette, Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: A History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (4 vols.; New York: Harper, 1959), vol. II, pp. 9-130; vol. IV, pp. 246-309.

² There were, in addition, a number of smaller "free churches" and sects, including Methodists, Baptists, Moravian Brethren, Mennonites, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as disenchanted, usually dogmatic-conservative, Lutheran and Reformed elements; see Civil Affairs Handbook: Germany--Section 1B: Christian Churches (Army Service Forces Manual M 356-1B; Washington: Headquarters, Army Service Forces, 1944), pp. 22-24.

had in turn been divided into thirty-four distinct Landeskirchen (state churches) corresponding to the states of the German Empire.³ The majority of the Landeskirchen espoused theological consistency within their regions. For example, the churches of Saxony, Württemberg, Bavaria and Schleswig-Holstein were Lutheran; while those of Prussia (the so-called Old Prussian Union), Nassau, the Pfalz and Baden were United. Several, however--such as Hesse-Kassel, Bremen and Frankfurt-am-Main--included all three confessions in a semi-autonomous relationship to the state church government, while the state of Hannover had two entirely separate Landeskirchen, one each for its Lutheran and Reformed congregations.⁴ In size, the state churches ranged from the tiny Evangelical Church of the District of Birkenfeld to the mammoth Evangelical Church of the Old Prussian Union.⁵ The latter was a nineteenth-century consolidation which reflected the political makeup of the pre-Bismarckian Kingdom of Prussia.⁶

The governments of the Landeskirchen were vertical, modeled on the essentially authoritarian, pseudo-democratic pattern of the Empire and its component parts. In many of the states, the regional prince had been the summus episcopus of the Church.⁷ In theory, and

³Charles S. Macfarland, The New Church and the New Germany: A Study of Church and State (New York: Macmillan, 1934), p. 17.

⁴Civil Affairs Handbook, pp. 12-21.

⁵Ibid.

⁶For a general discussion of the origins and development of the Old Prussian Union, see Latourette, vol. II, pp. 79-85.

⁷Ibid., vol. II, p. 100.

often in practice, this meant that the prince had had the right to partake actively in the governing of his state church. This was complemented by a second major area of state activity, the setting and collection of the church tax. All persons who did not take the legal steps necessary to renounce formally their church membership were subject to this tax, which represented the chief source of revenue for most of the churches.⁸ In effect, then, the Landeskirchen had been virtual arms of the several states, the strength of the tie varying in the different regions. What had most certainly not been evident was any real separation of church and state after the manner of Protestantism in much of Western Europe and the United States.

Then came the cataclysm of World War I and the advent of the Weimar Republic. The anti-clericalism of many republican leaders precipitated demands for church-state separation, and some provision for this was in fact made in the Weimar Constitution. This separation was partially achieved by the official breaking of the formal ties binding the churches to their respective states. Many vestiges of the old order, including the Landeskirchen and the church tax, remained; but the disappearance of the Empire and the regional princes brought some disorder to church government.⁹ In most of the state churches,

⁸ Latourette, vol. II, pp. 91, 100; vol. IV, p. 249. The tax was--and is--used for the support of the Catholic as well as the Protestant churches.

⁹ Ibid., vol. IV, pp. 248-249. By this time, there were only twenty-eight instead of the original thirty-four Landeskirchen, the total having been reduced by the consolidation, in Thuringia, of several independent units into one state church; see Macfarland, p. 22.

the office of bishop was created to fill the executive vacuum caused by the departure of the summus episcopus.¹⁰ Another result was a decided trend toward democracy in the selection of synodal councils and other church representative bodies.

The changes thus forced upon the churches brought in their wake calls for further transformation, particularly in the area of Protestant unity. Following the examples of the previous century, and influenced by the contemporaneously emerging ecumenical spirit, constructive criticism of the theological particularism of the Lutheran and Reformed churches was renewed. Far more significant, however, was the desire for geographical unity. The nineteenth century had not been devoid of efforts toward achieving this end, though little of practical importance had come of them.¹¹ But in the period of dislocation and increased political centralization following the war, similar attempts were more fruitful, and in 1922 the German Evangelical Church Federation was founded. A loose grouping of all the Landeskirchen, but with little real power of its own, the Federation nevertheless provided a forum for the discussion of church concerns, and at least a potential basis for unity.¹²

Such hopeful signs could not, however, obscure the fact that German Protestantism in the 1920's was in considerable turmoil. Deprived of its traditional relationship to the state, able only with

¹⁰ Latourette, vol. IV, p. 250.

¹¹ Ibid., vol. II, pp. 85-87.

¹² Ibid., vol. IV, pp. 249-250; Macfarland, pp. 21-23.

difficulty to accommodate itself to the new conditions, it was now characterized in large part by an unaccustomed sense of insecurity. The Weimar period, in addition, introduced a number of new elements which compounded the problem. Not the least of these were the activities of rival political parties seeking political advantage under the guise of religious concern. By the early 1930's, the most significant example of this trend was to be found in the sponsorship of the Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen" by the National Socialist Party.

The following chapters are concerned with this particular illustration of the interaction of religion and politics in Germany. It is also hoped that, by taking a specific aspect of NSDAP policy and examining it closely, some contribution may be made to the understanding of the operation of the Third Reich in general.

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

Postwar Völkisch Christianity

The onset of the Weimar Republic coincided with the beginning of what German Protestant leaders of the 1920's called the "crisis" of the evangelical church. This term referred primarily to the increasing apathy of the average churchgoer toward his institutional religious traditions. The crisis was characterized chiefly by non-participation in established religious functions, including regular church services, and was a problem long before the Deutschen Christen made it an issue in the early 1930's. It stemmed in part from a second factor, namely the general insecurity and disillusionment associated with the misfortunes of the Weimar republican experiment. Many evangelical clerics were critical of, even hostile toward, the republic, and such dissatisfaction naturally filtered down to bolster the already considerable anxieties of the people as a whole. Conversely, discontent with the very fabric of German Protestantism itself was fanned by the general aura of frustration. Perhaps the greatest problem, in itself both cause and effect of the crisis, was the ideological warfare which, with its religious and political overtones, was carried on within the church sphere. Liberals and conservatives, radicals and reactionaries, socialists and fascists, nationalists and ecumenists, and countless variations of these were to be found. Taken out of context, these terms are of course

meaningless; but they are at least descriptive of the varieties of opinions which flourished.

Of all the ideological viewpoints the most impenetrable, perhaps least homogeneous, yet nevertheless one of the most important, was the complex set of beliefs which may be loosely identified as völkisch.¹ There were many varieties of völkisch-religious outlooks in postwar Germany. As with National Socialism, there were elements of patriotic nationalism, "pathological discontent," and pure völkisch factors of both moderate and radical bent. Some were, or considered themselves to be, sincere Christians, but some were not. Some were sympathetic to National Socialism, some were not.² Most owed at least some of their ideas to such philosophers and pseudo-philosophers as Johann Gottfried Herder, Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, Paul de Lagarde, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Arthur Bonus and Max Maurenbrecher, most of whom were in turn concerned at least in part with the synthesis of völkisch and Christian concepts.³ To

¹Völkisch is one of many terms in the National Socialist lexicon which are not conveniently rendered into English equivalents. It comes from the root word Volk, whose literal translation is "people" or "nation." The closest meaning is probably "national," but the word carries with it strong implications of race and blood characteristic of the official NSDAP ideology.

²Hans Buchheim, Glaubenskrise im Dritten Reich: Drei Kapitel nationalsozialistischer Religionspolitik (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1953), pp. 41-43. The phrase "pathological discontent" is Buchheim's.

³Helmut Baier, Die Deutschen Christen Bayerns im Rahmen des bayerischen Kirchenkampfes (Nuremberg: Selbstverlag des Vereins für bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1968), pp. 3-4. On Maurenbrecher, see Günther van Norden, Kirche in der Krise: Die Stellung der Evangelischen Kirche zum Nationalsozialistischen Staat im Jahre 1933 (Düsseldorf: Presseverband der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, 1963), pp. 26-28.

combine these diverse strands into a single movement was possible, as Hans Buchheim has noted, only on a political basis.⁴ That this was attempted was due largely, but not exclusively, to the political ambitions of the NSDAP. That it was never more than a partial success, and ultimately a failure, was due to the essential incompatibility of the views involved.

The most significant event preceding the founding of the first völkisch-religious organization of any consequence occurred in 1917. In that year, as part of the activities commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's initial assault on Catholic malpractices, a pamphlet was issued which included the publication of ninety-five theses. Unlike Luther's propositions, however, these attempted to lay the groundwork for the harmonizing of evangelical Christianity with a variety of nationalistic, Nordic-racial themes. The signers of the theses included Hans Paul von Wolzogen of Bayreuth, Kirchenrat⁵ Dr. Ernst Katzer of Dresden, Professor Adolf Bartels of Weimar, and Pastor Friedrich Andersen of Flensburg.⁶ Andersen was typical of the group. Greatly influenced by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, he had over a period of years completed a metamorphosis from Protestant orthodoxy to völkisch advocacy. For some time he

⁴Buchheim, p. 41.

⁵A Kirchenrat is a member of a church committee or council, or the council itself. An Oberkirchenrat is a member of a superior church committee or council, or the council itself.

⁶Baier, pp. 5-6.

had been attacking the Old Testament and what he called the "Jewish beclouding of the pure teaching of Jesus."⁷

Some four years later, in June of 1921, the Bund für Deutsche Kirche⁸ was founded by academic circles connected with the Arndt-Hochschule, a völkisch institution in Berlin. The leading organizer and spiritual authority of the group, Joachim Kurd Niedlich, was an instructor at the school. Among the other leaders were the four prominent signatories of the ninety-five theses of 1917.⁹ An essential feature of the Bund's program was that it should not separate itself from the church; rather, it wished to encourage reform within the church, albeit on a völkisch basis. Three demands highlighted this call for reform: the Old Testament should be de-canonized; the "rabinnical redemption principle" of Paul should be abandoned; and the Bund should undertake the ". . . exposition of the heroic sacrificial death of Jesus in the light of German mysticism."¹⁰ The reforms would be aided, in part, by stressing the religious value of the ancient Germanic legends and sagas, and by developing a purely German form of worship service.¹¹

It is important to note that, despite the blatant anti-Semitism and what Protestant orthodoxy no doubt regarded as heresy, the Bund definitely considered itself to be working within

⁷Buchheim, p. 45.

⁸Literally, League for a German Church.

⁹Buchheim, p. 45.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 46.

¹¹Ibid., p. 47.

Christianity rather than against it. Forces advocating the latter approach were becoming increasingly prominent during the 1920's. The most notable organization of this type, characterized by violent anti-Christian rhetoric, was the Tannenbergbund, founded by the now half-mad General Erich Ludendorff and his second wife, Mathilde. Under Niedlich's leadership, on the contrary, the Bund's relationship with the churches became rather friendly, notwithstanding their evident differences.¹²

The Bund did not consider itself a new church political party as such, though it did participate occasionally in local church elections. In late 1925, it allied itself with several other völkisch-religious groups, while at the same time preserving its own identity. After Niedlich's death in 1928, the Bund became more radical and somewhat more zealous. Niedlich himself was criticized posthumously for having kept the Bund a small, largely intellectual group, as opposed to a more activist organization.¹³

In the meantime, religious circles close to the Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei (DNVP) and to the Stahlhelm were in the process of organizing another völkisch group. It was officially established in 1930 as the Christlich-deutsche Bewegung.¹⁴ Its chief founders, indicating both lay and clerical support, were a prominent landowner by the name of Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, court chaplain Dr. Bruno

¹²Buchheim, p. 47.

¹³Ibid.; Baier, p. 7.

¹⁴Literally, Christian-German Movement.

Doehring of Berlin, and the apparent driving force of the movement, Pastor Werner Wilm, a youth organization leader of the church. Of considerable significance to the prestige of the group was the presence therein of Heinrich Rendtorff, state bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Three prominent theologians--Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsch and Heinrich Bornkamm--were also members, a fact which further strengthened the CDB's early reputation in church circles. Dr. Friedrich Wieneke, cathedral pastor of Soldin, also belonged to the group. He was as yet little known, but was a figure of some distinction in that he was the only member of the movement who also belonged to the National Socialist Party.¹⁵

The Christlich-deutsche Bewegung was considerably less völkisch than the Bund für Deutsche Kirche and its associated groups. Like the political organizations whose protégé it was, the CDB was strongly conservative, but in a traditional sense. Its roots were essentially Prussian, though the German nationalism implied in the name was very real. Its members looked back fondly to the days of the Hohenzollern monarchy, when the place of the evangelical church in the state was more secure. The CDB's identification with German conservatism was further evinced by its stress upon the

¹⁵Friedrich Wieneke, Kirche und Partei, 1929-1945 (unpublished MS. on microfilm in the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich), p. 22; Kurt Meier, Die Deutschen Christen: Das Bild einer Bewegung im Kirchenkampf des Dritten Reiches (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), pp. 10-11; Buchheim, pp. 60-62; Baier, p. 8.

need for a revision of the Treaty of Versailles as a means to the restoration of Germany's spiritual honor.¹⁶ Nor was it surprising to see the movement denounce the liberalism, democracy, republicanism and socialism of the Weimar regime, participation in whose activities was even considered, by some CDB members, to be a "sin against the Holy Spirit."¹⁷

Despite the traditional nature of its conservatism and the membership of but one National Socialist, the movement took an interest in the NSDAP and actively sought its support. For a time, the Party seemed interested. But the CDB's rightist ideology was rooted far more in relatively solid traditional beliefs and practices than in the more superficial völkisch views which interested the NSDAP; to the Party, as one National Socialist noted, the movement's concept of the Volk was not fully developed.¹⁸ The disillusionment on both sides gradually became greater. By the time Bishop Rendtorff assumed full leadership of the CDB in 1932, the opportunity for a close working relationship had passed.¹⁹

¹⁶Baier, pp. 8-9; Buchheim, p. 60.

¹⁷Baier, p. 9.

¹⁸Arnold Dannenmann, Die Geschichte der Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen" (Dresden: Oskar Günther, 1933), pp. 15-16; Friedrich Wieneke, Die Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen" (4th ed.; Soldin: Madrasch, 1933), pp. 8-9.

¹⁹Wieneke, Kirche und Partei, pp. 25-26.

The Bund für Deutsche Kirche and the Christlich-deutsche Bewegung sprang up in the highly unstable political and religious atmosphere of the 1920's and the early 1930's. With their connections, they could hope confidently for meaningful ties with a variety of political parties and organizations. That neither was able ultimately to win the full support of National Socialism was due in part to their own characteristics and attitudes, in part to the positions and the relatively stringent requirements of the NSDAP itself. Eventually, the latter decided that it needed its own movement, as opposed to making use of an existing one. When this decision was at last made, the birth of the Glaubensbewegung "Deutsche Christen" was only a matter of time.

National Socialism and Christianity

Any analysis of the relationship between National Socialism and Christianity presupposes the importance of the views of Adolf Hitler on the matter. At the same time, however, care must be taken to recognize in Hitler both the ideologue and the consummate politician as an explanation of his apparently inconsistent views toward the churches.

Not surprisingly, the public Hitler was the epitome of reason with regard to religious matters. Time and again, during both his rise to power and his tumultuous first year as Chancellor, the Führer was at pains to express his dedication to Christianity. Some time before taking office, he insisted that Christianity was